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ABSTRACT

Since the 1960s the number of Danish wives going out to work has increased. In 1975, a national survey was conducted to elucidate farmers' wives' work performance in their homes and on and outside the farm. Only women under the age of 60 who were married to self-employed farmers with holdings of more than 5 hectares (1 hectare = 2.47 acres) were interviewed. Based on interviews with 320 women, these wives were divided into 4 groups: those who attended to the housework and had no other employment--wives not going out to work; those who assisted their husbands but had no other employment--assisting wives; those who had work outside the home and did not assist with farm work--working wives; and those who assisted with farm work and also had work outside the farm--assisting and going out to work. Some findings were: 26% were gainfully employed outside the farm, 72% normally assisted on the farm, and 16% had no employment besides their housework; women who went out to work were frequently found among the younger ones who had received vocational training; assisting wives were mainly found on the medium-sized holdings, ranging in size from 10 to 29 hectares; in most cases, employment outside the farm had given the farmer's wife a double workload; and assisting and going out to work wives were not relieved of domestic chores to a larger extent than the other wives. (NQ)

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"Working Conditions of Women Married to Selfemployed Farmers"

by

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Seminar 14: The Changing Roles of Women in Rural Societies

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"Working Conditions of Women Married to Selfemployed Farmers"[+)]

OCCUPATIONAL FREQUENCY OF MARRIED WOMEN

During the last few decades one has been able to observe that a constantly growing number of married women have been attracted to the labour market. The increase in the occupational frequency has been particularly heavy since the early 1960s when married women, not belonging to the working class, and women in less urbanized areas have also obtained work outside their homes. The change can be illustrated by means of the percentages of married women under 60 who have had paid work outside the home. In 1960 the rate of working women was less than 25 per cent, in 1970 about 50 per cent, and in 1974 as high as 66 per cent.

If society is viewed generally, part of the explanation of this change is to be found in the fact that the high rate of economic activity has resulted in a great demand for labour. Connected with this, more advantageous wage conditions and taxation rules have been introduced, which have in particular enhanced married women's economic advantages of undertaking work outside the home. Moreover, society has given some married women greater possibilities of reducing the burden of work in their homes by establishing a large number of day-care centres and leisure-time centres for children and youth. Finally, young women in particular, have been given bigger opportunities of obtaining better jobs, both as far as wages and type of work are concerned, because, as a result of recent years' expansion in the educational sector, a relatively large proportion of young women have received vocational training.

+) Extract and Summary by Henrik Mørkeberg: Landhusmødres arbejdsforhold. Landbrugsministeriets Produktivitetsudvalg. Husholdningsudvalget. København 1976.

THE DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL DISTRICTS

Until a few years ago hardly any of the women married to selfemployed farmers were gainfully employed outside the farm. However, it has become increasingly common for farmers' wives to have work outside their homes. Part of the explanation of this is to be found in the increase in the number of openings for women in rural districts, and in the fact that jobs have become more varied. Thus, a number of business enterprises mainly looking for female labour have been located in the small townships in rural districts where a development of the public service in the social security and health sector has also provided a number of new jobs. As practically all farming families have their own car, the geographical distance to these townships has not been any hindrance to farmers' wives frequenting these places of work.

The increase in the number of farmers' wives who have work outside the home must also be seen in the light of the development which has taken place on the farms:

In the first place, farmers' wives are less tied to their homes. This is due partly to a reduction in the number of hired labour, coupled with extended mechanization, and partly to the fact that fewer farming families have children living at home.

Secondly, structural changes within farming may have led to a desire among farmers' wives for a job outside the home for social reasons. For reduced opportunities for social intercourse on the individual farm, resulting from the reduction in the number of domestic servants and farm workers as well as family members, have also made themselves felt in the relationship between families in rural districts, the total number of agricultural holdings having decreased by one-third since 1960. Connected with a demand for a growing work performance on the part of the members of the farming family, this depopulation has resulted in fewer possibilities of social contact with neighbours, just as club life has become restricted.

Farmers' wives have previously had a heavy workload in their homes, and a large number of them have also assisted with farm work. Compared with other married women they have had an extra burden of work by making themselves most food from their own farm products. Because the traditional pattern of sex roles has been particularly widespread in farming families, farmers' wives have as a rule undertaken the responsibility for and the work of running the home. Moreover, a large number of them have had to take part in the work on the farm to replace paid farm labour.

THE SURVEY OF THE WORKING CONDITIONS OF FARMERS' WIVES

Against the background of the change in the occupational situation of farmers' wives, the Home Economics Committee of the Ministry of Agriculture [+)] decided, in 1975, to commission a survey with the aim of elucidating farmers' wives' work performance in their homes as well as their work on and outside the farm. Moreover, the survey was to describe the farmer's wife's situation with regard to her possibilities of making use of public services for children and youth available to her within a reasonable distance from her home. Against this background the problems dealt with in this survey were formulated in the following questions:

(1) Which groups of farmers' wives have been drawn to the labour market, and which groups will normally assist with work on the farm?

(2) Which working conditions are connected with the farmers' wives' work on and outside the farm?

(3) What are farmers' wives' working conditions in the home?

(4) How is the situation of farmers' wives with regard to possibilities of child care, holidays and leisure time?

+) Represented by chairmen and secretaries from
The Home Economics Committee of the Danish Family Farmers Associations,
The Home Economics Committee of the Federation of Danish Farmer's Unions, and
The Federation of Danish Home Economics Associations.

Material and Method

The survey was planned as a national survey, and interviews, based on a questionnaire, were carried out with a random sample of women who in the early summer of 1975 were married to selfemployed farmers. However, the survey only includes married women under the age of 60, as it was a preconceived assumption that there would be only very limited changes in the working situation of farmers' wives over this age. Nor does the survey include the wives of farmers whose holdings are less than 5 hectares +), as it is no longer compulsory for such small farm units to be cultivated.

The main results of the survey, based on interviews with 320 families, are as follows:-

The different working situation of farmers' wives

In the survey the farmers' wives were divided into 4 groups with different working situations:

(1) Wives who attend to the housework and have no other employment (wives not going out to work)

(2) Wives who assist their husbands, but have no other employment (assisting wives)

(3) Wives who have work outside the home and who do not assist with farm work (working wives)

(4) Wives who assist with farm work and also have work outside the farm (assisting + going out to work).

If we look at the proportion of farmers' wives who do work other than housework, it is seen that 58 per cent normally assist with farm work but have no other employment, whereas 14 per cent both assist with farm work and have work outside the farm. 12 per cent have work outside the farm and do not assist with farm work, while 16 per cent look after the home and have no other work. Taken as a whole, this means that 84 per cent of farmers' wives are employed with work other than housework, and that 26 per cent have work outside the farm.

+) One hectare = 2.47 acres

By comparing these percentages with an investigation of social consequences of structural changes in agriculture which was carried out by the Danish National Institute of Social Research [+)] in 1969, it is possible to judge the development. Such a comparison shows that there has been a very sharp increase in the proportion of farmers' wives who have work outside the farm. Thus it was estimated in the investigation carried out by the Danish National Institute of Social Research that 6 per cent had work outside the farm in 1960, that this proportion had risen to 13 per cent in 1966, and that it had gone up to 17 per cent in 1968. This trend seems to have continued as, as mentioned, the findings of the present survey are that 26 per cent have work outside the farm.

It is in particular the wives of farmers with small holdings who go out to work, whereas where holdings between 10 and 29 hectares are concerned, the wives assist on the farm comparatively frequently. In the case of farm holdings of over 30 hectares a relatively high proportion of farmers' wives do the housework and have no other work. Even if there is a larger number of elderly women on the smaller farms, the younger women have nevertheless, on the whole, more frequently work outside the farm.

This must be seen, among other things, in relation to the fact that younger housewives on the larger farms have often received vocational training. Thus the findings of the survey are that vocational training has a considerable influence on the working situation of the farmer's wife. 62 per cent of the housewives who have received a training of short duration (1-3 years) have work outside the farm, whereas this applies to 36 per cent of those who have served an apprenticeship, and to 16 per cent of those without any vocational training. Conversely, it is not so common for wives who assist their husbands to have received such training.

+) G. Viby Mogensen: De sociale konsekvenser af landbrugets strukturændringer. Socialforskningsinstituttets publikation nr. 46. København 1970. (With an English Summary).

The survey does not show that farmers' wives have work outside the farm less often if there are children under the age of seven living at home than if this is not the case. On the other hand the total number of persons in the household is of importance in the way that the housewife will frequently go out to work if there are few persons in the household, and that she will frequently attend to the housework if the household consists of many persons. In other words this stresses the fact that the reduction in the number of hired labour in agriculture has been a decisive prerequisite for farmers' wives to take jobs outside the farm.

Structural changes in agriculture have also meant that throughout the 1960s a growing number of farmers have taken jobs outside the farm. Thus it was estimated in the survey conducted by the Danish National Institute of Social Research mentioned above that one-third of farmers had part-time work in 1968, as opposed to one-fifth in 1960. Since only just under one-quarter of the farmers' wives included in the present survey stated that their marriage partner had part-time work in 1974, it must be concluded that the rise in the number of farmers working part-time has been replaced by a fall. This is probably to be seen in relation to the circumstance that the need for supplementing the income from farming has become less, that some of the farmers who previously had part-time jobs have now left farming, and that growing unemployment throughout 1974 has reduced the farmers' possibilities of obtaining part-time work. Finally we cannot exclude the possibility that the increase in the number of farmers' wives going out to work has made it less necessary, financially, for husbands to have part-time work.

Unemployment does not seem to have had any influence on the extent of work undertaken by farmers' wives outside their homes. This can probably be explained by the circumstance that it has been possible for a large proportion of these women to retain their jobs, either as a consequence of their vocational training or because they have been employed by public institutions. It is true that the survey reveals a slightly larger number of working women in 1974

than at the time of interviewing in the early summer of 1975, but this difference must be accounted for by the fact that in 1974 one-fifth of the women were employed less than 9 months of the year, so that the small decrease can be attributable to seasonal fluctuations.

Farmers' wives going out to work

Although a large number of farmers' wives who go out to work are occupied all the year round, only some of them have full-time jobs. The results of the survey seem to suggest that the increase in the number of working housewives is connected with increased opportunities for part-time work. Nevertheless, 39 per cent are occupied 30 hours per week or more.

Two-thirds of those going out to work spend less than 30 minutes daily on travelling to and from work. Even if it is possible for 83 per cent to use their own car when going to work, the short travelling time seems to indicate that a great many of the working wives have jobs in small townships nearby. This is further underlined by the fact that the distance from their homes to the town has no bearing on the farmer's wife having work outside her home.

Wives assisting their husbands

If we look at assisting wives' participation in work on the farm, it appears that 57 per cent are normally working 20 hours per week or more, and that 19 per cent normally spend 30 hours or more on farm work. While it is mainly the wives of farmers with holdings of 10-29 hectares who assist with work on the farm, it is found that wives assisting farmers whose holdings are over 30 hectares work more hours per week on the farm than is the case of the smaller holdings.

83 per cent of assisting wives normally attend to part of the work in the stables. This applies especially to younger wives, and to those who have no work outside the farm in addition to their housework. On the other hand it is almost equally widespread on farms of different sizes.

A very considerable proportion of assisting wives, i.e. 79 per cent, also normally take part in field work. This form of assistance is found equally frequently for those who assist on the farm only and for those who in addition to farm work have work outside the farm, and it is especially on holdings between 10 and 29 hectares that the wives take a great share in the work. The age of the wife does not seem to be of importance as to whether she assists in the field. However, her age is important with regard to assistance with the working accounts. 55 per cent of assisting wives under the age of 35 help their husbands with the accounts, whereas this is only the case of 36 per cent of those aged 55-59. Altogether 46 per cent take part in the work of doing the accounts, and 50 per cent of these women have either attended courses on business economy or received advice from a consultant.

Housework

The farmers' wives who run the house and have no other work must work harder than the other wives with regard to keeping the house in order. For one thing, the dwelling is bigger, and secondly more rooms are used,and finally there are more persons in the household than in those families where the wives either assist with the farm work or go out to work. Moreover, they have to a lesser degree than especially assisting wives introduced labour-saving devices into their homes. A kitchen-dining-room is used in 90 per cent of the families and slightly more frequently when the housewives assist with farm work, just as most technical aids are to be found in the households of these families.

In the traditional farm household home-slaughtering and home-made food have as a rule been an economic necessity for the family. With better earnings in the farming industry obtained in recent years, the growing workload on the farmers' wives, and in particular the increased income from gainful employment outside the farm, one might have assumed that such tasks would have become less common. It is found,

however, that home slaughtering is still done in nearly all farming families. Moreover cold meats for sandwiches are chiefly home-made in connection with home-slaughtering, regardless whether the farmer's wife assists with farm work, whether she goes out to work or whether she has both forms of occupation. Cold meats bought at shops are, however, used a little more frequently by working wives who do not assist with farm work.

Practically all the families questioned have a kitchen garden. In the survey an index was constructed on the basis of the information given by the farmers' wives as to how many of eight vegetables, mentioned in advance, were grown. These types were selected as examples of vegetables requiring a comparatively large work contribution. It appears that 85 per cent grow at least 5 different vegetables out of these 8 vegetables. As the most important reasons for retaining the kitchen garden, 43 per cent mention reasons of economy, 23 per cent state reasons of health, and 16 per cent mention that they grow vegetables out of interest. Some hint, however, that tradition also plays a part.

Thus, in farming families there are still more tasks to be carried out in the home than in other families. As farmers' wives assist on the farms to a large extent, or are gainfully employed outside the home, one could reasonably ask to what extent division of work has been carried through in the home. It appears that most farmers' wives attend to all domestic duties themselves, no matter whether they go out to work, whether they assist on the farm or whether they have both forms of occupation. Yet, working wives are relieved a little more of daily chores than other farmers' wives. However, this does not apply to those working both on the farm and outside it. On comparison with previous investigations thus no tendency is found for farmers to assist with domestic work more frequently than 10 years ago, even if the assistance was already then smaller than within other occupational groups.

As farmers' wives will normally have to do many domestic chores single-handed, the total work performance in the home

will naturally become great. Thus, 33 per cent of all interviewed persons stated that their daily housework absorbs 8 hours or more.

Child-care

As mentioned, one important factor underlying the general increase in married women's occupational frequency was the establishment of day-care centres and leisure-time centres for children and youth. The more thinly populated areas have not, to the same extent as towns, benefited from this development. Part of the explanation is to be found in the fact that the total number of children in these areas has declined in step with the increase in the average age of selfemployed farmers.

However, the development within agriculture and the rest of society has led to an increased need for farmers' children to be looked after outside their homes for some hours of the day. One could point out, first of all, that the possibilities of children's contact with children of the same age are reduced because very few farming families have young children.

Secondly, mechanization in agriculture has involved that children cannot to the same extent as previously walk about the farm and on the farmland under safe conditions unless they are under supervision. As there are fewer farm workers on the farms, and as parents will consequently have to carry out a considerably larger number of functions on the farm, the possibilities of keeping an eye on young children have become very restricted. Thirdly, this has some bearing on the farmers' wives' possibilities of taking a job outside the home. They will have very few possibilities of undertaking work outside the home if the children cannot be looked after by people other than members of the family itself.

Finally, the imbalance in the development of day-care centres, not giving the more thinly populated areas their fair deal, has involved the risk that farmers' children will be in a less fortunate position compared with children in town areas. In the investigation carried out by the Danish

National Institute of Social Research of the importance of the day nursery and the crèche for the development of the child[+)] it was thus stated that a day nursery seems to further the child's intellectual development, its creativeness, its conceptualization, its readiness for school and its social development.

It appears from the results of the survey that one-third of the farmers' wives find that the possibilities of having children under the age of seven looked after are insufficient in that region or the country where they live. In particular, a better provision of day nursery places is wanted. A large proportion of the women who were questioned, i.e. 25 per cent, also find that existing opportunities for leisure-time activities for 7-14-year-olds are insufficient. It was of no importance for the responses given by farmers' wives to these questions whether they themselves had children within the age groups in question.

Holidays and leisure

Compared with other married women, farmers' wives have only restricted possibilities of going on holiday or of taking a few days off. Only 36 per cent stated that they had been on holiday in 1974. This was the case of 50 per cent of women going out to work, and of 50 per cent of those not having work outside the home, whereas only just over 25 per cent of those assisting their husbands with farmwork had been on holiday.

Whether it will be possible for a farming family to go on holiday or take a day off, will in most cases depend on the existence of a holiday relief for farmers in the area concerned, and on the family's wish to make use of this relief, should occasion arise. It appears that 70 per cent of the families have the possibility of joining such a holiday

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+) Arne Sjølund: Børnehavens og vuggestuens betydning for barnets udvikling. Socialforskningsinstituttets publikation nr. 38. København 1969. (With an English Summary).

relief arrangement, but only 14 per cent of the families have availed themselves thereof. The financial cost connected with such an arrangement seems, essentially, to account for the poor support.

ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of the 1960s a very heavy increase in the number of married women going out to work has been observed in Denmark. This development has also taken place among women married to selfemployed farmers, although most of these women's employment is connected with the farm where they assist their husbands with the farm work.

The increase in the number of farmers' wives going out to work must be seen, among other things, against the background of changes in the social structure of agriculture and rural districts. The economic growth has provided better employment openings in the small townships in rural districts and, also, younger women have more frequently received vocational training, which enhances their opportunities for obtaining more attractive work. Moreover the structural changes in agriculture have been characterized by a reduction in the number of hired labour, and this has made farmers' wives less tied to the home as far as work is concerned.

It appears from a survey which was carried out in the early summer of 1975, based on interviews with 320 women married to farmers, that 26 per cent are gainfully employed outside the farm, 72 per cent normally assist on the farm, whereas 16 per cent have no employment besides their housework. The women who go out to work are comparatively frequently to be found among the younger ones who have received vocational training. These women seem to have preferred to go out to work not particularly for reasons of economy. There has been a greater need for supplementing the income from farming on the smaller holdings, from which most working women have been recruited, whereas assisting wives are mainly to be found on the medium-sized holdings, ranging in size from 10 to 29 hectares.

In most cases employment outside the farm has given the farmer's wife a double workload. Thus the traditional pattern of sex roles according to which it is left to the wife to undertake the most important functions in the home, making her chiefly responsible for the house-keeping, the care and upbringing of the children, has not undergone any noticeable change as a result of her increased participation in work outside the farm. Besides attending to most domestic duties single-handed, practically all farmers' wives have an extra burden of work, compared with other married women, by making themselves food from their own farm products, including home-slaughtering and tending a kitchen garden. A particularly heavy burden of work rests on women who work on the farm as well as outside it, as these women are not relieved of domestic chores to a larger extent than the other wives.